EFFECTIVE AUDIO/VISUAL PRESENTATIONS
by H.Dean Chamberlain

Catchy title, right? Maybe, this article should be titled, "I was there, but I could not see." or maybe, we should call it the dreaded, "Worst Presentation I Ever Attended." The point is all of us have seen, and hopefully not given, presentations where the speaker had an interesting point to make, but because we could not see, read, or hear the material, we lost interest in the presentation. A presentation was given, but it was not effective. So what can be done to make <u>your</u> presentation effective. Read on.

The development of electronic computer presentations has changed forever the way most people think of making presentations. Today, anyone with the right computer hardware and software can make video presentations that graphic artists could not make a few years ago. But being able to make a presentation is not the same as knowing how to make an effective presentation. The following are some suggestions for anyone planning on making a public presentation. The suggestions are not made with the intent of insulting anyone's presentation skills or style, past, present, or future. Our goal is to give everyone some ideas to think about when planning and producing a public presentation. We are defining public to mean any presentation to any group too large to comfortably view a standard TV in a small room. our comments will not discuss presentation content. Only the person giving a presentation can know and understand what a program's content must include. Content is based upon what the presenter wants the audience to do after receiving (notice we did not say the limiting terms of only hearing or seeing) the presentation. All presentations or messages have a desired audience outcome or response. In some cases, the result may be to purchase an item, change one's belief, support a cause, or any desired result that can be influenced by a given message. In our Case we are promoting aviation safety.

When considering your audience, be aware you need to follow DOT/FAA policy regarding access for those with disabilities or special needs such as signing, etc. Because of previous FAA policy guidance, we will not go into specifics on this issue other than to remind everyone that it is an important one.

COMPUTER GRAPHICS AND POWERPOINT SOFTWARE

Most FAA presenters have access to some type of presentation software. Since PowerPoint is so common, we will use it as our example software. PowerPoint offers presenters more options than most people probably need. PowerPoint has a format and color combination for just about every type of situation. You tell PowerPoint what you want, and it tells you how to produce it. What PowerPoint does not do is tell you how to use the produced material.

Recently, we watched several different computer presentations in differing settings. Some of the presentations were in very large rooms with several hundred people. In others, the presentations were to small groups of less than a hundred people. The rooms varied in size from long and narrow to wide and shallow. The light in the rooms varied from very dark, to dark, to the light is keeping me awake; bright.

In some cases, the presentations were readable throughout the room. In other cases, people in the front of the room had problems reading the material. You can imagine the problems people in the back of the room had reading the material. Some people sitting out on the wings could not even see the material. In other cases, the video, overhead, slide equipment, etc., used in the presentation blocked the view of those sitting behind the gear. In some cases, the person giving the presentation disrupted the briefing by either walking in front of the screen, reading directly from the screen word by word, speaking to the screen, and pacing in front of the screen.

The readability problems are easy to explain. They are harder for presenters to correct. As Kodak has explained in its many publications over the years about effective slide and multimedia presentations, readability in any size room is a function of such things as the intensity of the projected light, size of type used in the presentation, color and contrast of images, viewing angle of the individual audience participant, and the type of screen the image is projected upon. Those who developed slide presentations in the past, knew about such topics because of the expertise and work that went into such productions.

Today, anyone with a computer can develop a presentation. The problem is the person making the presentation seldom tests the presentation under the conditions in which it may be given. The fact is most presentations look great to the briefer standing on the stage or at the podium. The problem is most podiums and stages are in front of the room; not in the back of the room where someone might be struggling to read your material.

The best test of any presentation is for the presenter/developer to simulate the actual presentation conditions and to view the complete presentation from the last seat in each of the four corners of the room to see if the presentation if readable. In many cases, people sitting in the front wings of a room have as great or greater viewing problem as the person in the last seat in the back of the room. The problem is some screens are designed to reflect light back along a rather narrow viewing angle towards the projector. People seated outside of that angle have a difficult time trying to view the material. Another problem with light is it varies with the inverse of the square of the distance. This simply means you need a lot of light for an image to be seen brightly in the back of a large room. Another factor is the style of type used, the simpler the better, and the contrast between type and background. For example, a very light color or white type against a dark background is easy to read as is a very dark type against a light colored background. The key is high contrast between type and background.

Another problem is in some cases, presenters have little or no control over the type of projector available or the size of the room for the presentation. So what can you do'?

You can design for the worst type situation, then if you find yourself in an ideal room with great equipment you are a winner. If you find your self in a poor room with inadequate equipment, you are still a winner. A good rule of thumb is to design a presentation for an audience twice the size of your expected audience. Another idea is to always have a presentation ready that does not depend upon visual aids. This way, if you have a problem, you are ready to beat Murphy's Law about if it can happen, it will.

So where do you start. First, if possible, find out what type of room and equipment you will have available to use. The more information the better. The following are a few of the types of questions to checkout. Although the ideal system is to have your own equipment; equipment you know how to use and for which you have backup spares and extra bulbs, computer cables, etc., sometimes you have to use the house equipment. At a minimum, you should call and talk to the person responsible for the audio/visual equipment at the presentation site to find out what type of equipment is available. Ideally, you should arrange to set up and practice your presentation at the site before your audience arrives. Give yourself enough time to fix any problems that may develop.

BASIC PRESENTATION CHECKLIST

In any case, you should check the following.

- Have you developed and followed a checklist for the equipment you are using and presentation you are giving?
- Room size, dimensions, and access
- Electrical outlets and need for extension cords Type of sound system and number of mikes, etc., and check for interference, especially if you are using wireless mikes
- Number of people in the audience
- Background of the audience, are they familiar with your subject matter
- Seating arrangements, will people block your access to your equipment or screen or video monitors What type of area do you have to work in Do you have a podium if you need one
- Do you have or need a pointer or laser pointer Type of projection equipment available
- Do you have a slide projector, overhead projector, video projector, computer, etc. compatible with your slides, tapes, computer disk, operating software, file, or whatever material you are going to use. Recently I attended a presentation where the speaker had his slides in a circular slide case and the available projector used straight slide trays. In today's world of computers, is your computer disk/format compatible with the computer to be used?
- If you are using an overhead projector, are your transparencies in frames so that they will lie flat, project evenly in focus across the frame, and block unwanted light?
- Type of screen and viewing angle or number and size of video monitors
- Type of sunlight control, dark drapes, none, etc. Type of indoor lighting control, adjustable, etc. Equipment that is compatible with your computer system, etc.
- Are there any outside distractions and noise
- Need for any special connectors, hardware, software, wiring, cables, remote controls, etc.
- Time and access to practice the presentation
- If the audience is expected to take notes, have you provided tables or some type of writing surface, etc. for them to write on?
- Do you have a low-tech program as a backup in case you have a major program/equipment failure.

- ✈ If you are using a computer program with a video projector, have you made a backup of the program?
- ✈ Whenever possible, bring your own equipment. This is especially important when using computer equipment. When using someone else's computer equipment, be aware that computer viruses might be loaded on the computer.

These are some of the factors that are important in planning any presentation. How well you know the above factors determines how well your presentation will be.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

When using electronic graphics and software such as PowerPoint, remember when selecting colors for copy and backgrounds that the higher the contrast between the colors, the greater the probability that the copy will be readable in a large room. Normally, what looks good on a computer screen may or may not look good on a projection system. As stated earlier, the best way to check a presentation is to use the actual equipment you will use during the presentation in the room where the presentation will be given. Multiple video monitors in a room may be a better choice than a single large screen projection system.

Also, when listing ideas and bullet items, it is better to only list the topic or bullet item being discussed rather than all of the topics or bullets at once if you want to keep your audience's attention.

Another idea to keep your audience's attention is to print out your material as a handout so people won't have to divert their attention to take unnecessary notes. The risk is people may then read the material rather than listening to your presentation. The good news is they will have the exact information you wanted them to take away from the meeting.

Be aware that a cluttered image or screen does not always equate into a readable one. Presenting too much information is as bad if not worse than not presenting enough information. Remember the goal is to inform or persuade, not to confuse.

If using charts, consider a simple 2-dimensional chart or graph rather than a fancy 3-dimensional one that is harder to read. The audience should not have to work to read your charts or graphs. Color should be used to enhance the rapid assimilation of information, not just to brighten or add a splash of color to a chart or graph. The rule is one concept per slide. You have about six seconds to give your message to the average person.

If using an overhead projector, always adjust the image for the audience, not for your own readability. If you must read the material, use the screen as a last resort. Better yet, make briefing notes instead.

If giving a video presentation, a small TV or laptop screen placed where you can see it, makes it easier for you to view the presentation and narrate it.

When you ate satisfied with your presentation, make an extra copy of it. Computer disks can get damaged or erased, slides can get lost, and overhead projector material can getdamaged.Remember "Murphy's Rules." In the presentation business,one should be written that says, "The moreimportant the presentation, the greater the probability thatsomething will go wrong."

Take good notes of the presentations you thought were good or bad. Copy the good ideas. Avoid the bad. You should share your experience with others in the Aviation Safety Program including your counselors. One way is to send your comments to me for reprinting in the ASP Newsletter. Good luck on your next presentation.

The final comment for a good presentation was made by Chuck Hicks from Western Pacific. He said the secret to a good presentation is to, "Practice, Practice, and Practice."

Editor's Note: I want to thank Chuck Hicks, RSPM WP, and Mike Beiriger, RSPM GL, for their comments and suggestions about these ideas. I also want to thank the many people who have discussed their ideas with me over the years on how to give a good presentation.

I would like to ask everyone to review these comments and ideas and sent me your comments . I Will then periodically update this material for use in the ASP . Another question is what do you think about making this guide into an ASP Presentation Guide that would be available for distribution through the "on Demand' P-Pamphlet distribution process currently being developed. That way, you could order copies for your counselors as needed. We could format the guide into a small P-Pamphlet size booklet. Please let me know.

One final comment, your local camera store has many good books on giving effective presentations. Your local library i3 also a good source.